



**“The same Lord is Lord of all and richly
blesses all who call on him.”**

Romans 10:12b

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REMOVING THE WALLS IN HONDURAS

By Richard Gammill

<http://engagemagazine.com/content/removing-walls-honduras>

It began as a set of classrooms housing ministry to 20 children and youth. It became a soccer field reaching out to 160 young people around the neighborhood. A pastor's passion and the voice of God prompted the change.

Cristian Juarez is pastor of Tres de Mayo Church of the Nazarene in Tegucigalpa, capital of Honduras. He was a man on a search. Like most Hondurans, Pastor Cristian is an avid soccer fan, but he also has a passion for ministering to youth. The mix of these two passions is where our story begins.

Cristian had a vision for a soccer field near his Tres de Mayo church where he could invite youth from his neighborhood to come and play. The church occupies a two-story building. The upper level is a new, very commodious sanctuary. The ground level was divided into Sunday school rooms, with twenty children in average attendance. For two years, he searched for an affordable nearby property. Two Nazarene churches in the United States were ready to back the project if he found something suitable. When he could find nothing, one of the churches moved on to support another project.



It looked like his dream had hit a dead end. Then early one morning, during his devotional time, he sensed God speaking to him. This is what he heard: “Use what you have. Get rid of the classrooms and open up the space for a soccer field.”

The pastor was shocked by the idea. He went to his church board with his new vision, and they were shocked as well. “Our classrooms are only three years old. They are nice classrooms; why would you want to get rid of them?”

He went to his father, who assisted him in the ministry. The elder Juarez also thought it was a

ridiculous idea. "Are you sure it was God's voice you heard?"

Feeling twice rejected, he spent more time in prayer, seeking assurance of God's will. He went back to his board and his father. "I truly believe this is how God is leading us, for the sake of the youth in our neighborhood." Although still skeptical, his board and his father consented to the radical project and agreed to give it their support. The classroom walls soon disappeared, replaced by artificial turf and goals.

Honduran youth are always looking for a place to play soccer. In 2013, when Pastor Cristian's invitation went out to the neighborhood, two dozen players showed up. In his first year, he had three teams of eight players participating in the ministry. Over the following two years, the ministry grew rapidly. Today, just three years into the ministry, more than 160 youth lace up their shoes every week and play soccer where walls once stood.

The church sees the league as an outreach. The athletes are not required to be Christians but they do agree to attend a youth service every Thursday evening. The players hear the Gospel during Thursday night worship and they share in team devotions on game days.

Before the walls went down, twenty children and young people attended the Sunday school. Now, over 160 youth who were beyond the reach of the church are presented with the gospel. However, it doesn't stop there. Pastor Cristian is actively reaching out to the neighborhoods where his players live. In those neighborhoods, he has established six preaching and teaching points. He also leads an adult league at a soccer field a few blocks from the central market downtown. Through that league, Cristian is ministering to over 200 men each week. Pastor Cristian's love of youth and soccer have merged into a large field of witness and ministry.

Twenty-five Nazarene churches are located in the Tegucigalpa metro area, notorious for its violence and crime. Hundreds of Honduran children and youth have fled to the United States. As word of Pastor Cristian's success has spread, many of these churches seek to establish a soccer ministry as a dynamic way to reach out to these at-risk youth.

Tres de Mayo is the first Nazarene church in Honduras to employ an onsite soccer field as an evangelistic tool. That's about to change. The church leadership in Honduras plans to replicate this ministry throughout the country. Nearly a dozen Honduran churches have property that would accommodate the same type of soccer field that Tres de Mayo utilizes. Other churches will need to find nearby property that is suitable and affordable.

The two districts in Honduras are looking for partner churches (or districts) that will collaborate with them and help this vision become a reality. The concept is to host leagues for youth teams during the day and permit adult teams to rent the fields in the evenings. Once established, each soccer center could be self-sustaining and even help support other types of compassionate ministries.

Jason Courtney, Work & Witness Coordinator, is watching this venture closely. He estimates each soccer field will cost around \$10,000 for the building materials, lights and equipment. He is looking for Work & Witness teams to support this project.

[Click here](#) to watch a video about this ministry.